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THE HELL DIGGERS

From the Saturday Evening Post Story

By

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Teddy Darman, construction superintendent of the great Continental Gold Dredging Company, a typical dredgeman, measuring success by the yardage his boats dig, computing efficiency by the number of fertile acres his ever-hungry dredges destroy, finds that the very magnitude of his success threatens to wreck his own happiness. For Dora Wade, the daughter of a farmer, shares the farming community's bitter hatred of the dredges and its dislike of all dredge-men -- "Hell Diggers", as they call them.

Old John Wade, Dora's father, is the leader of a clan of farmers who for years have waged unrelenting war on the gold dredges, huge floating ships that navigate by digging their own pond as they go, winnowing the gold from every cubic foot of soil from surface to bedrock, leaving behind them the soil at the bottom and the cobblestones piled on top in windrows twenty-five to forty feet high, and destroying for all time the agricultural value of the land -- veritable hell diggers.

The farmers, under the leadership of John Wade, have tried to put a bill through the Legislature, prohibiting gold dredging, but have failed. They hold a meeting, during which they pledge themselves not to sell an inch of ground to the Company for dredging.

The officials of the Continental, on their own account, are holding a meeting to celebrate the defeat of the "Wade Bill". Teddy, fresh from a talk with Dora, tries to show them the necessity of conciliating the farmers, but Masters, the manager, loudly talks him down. Teddy is now more determined than ever to cast his lot with the "yaps", as Masters calls them. He begins to see the destruction wrought by the dredges through the farmers' eyes, and sets to work on plans for a re-soiling dredge.

He perfects his plans and, determined to give the Company every chance, takes them to Masters. The manager is out, but Hoskins, the book-keeper, takes him to a safe and shows him a shelf full of similar plans. Hoskins tells him the Continental Company has bought every plan submitted, and then consigned them to oblivion.

Teddy is staggered. The evidence is unmistakable. The company has had in its hands for some time the remedy to stop the destruction of the land, but rather than go to the additional expense, has purchased and hidden the designs. Teddy hurriedly checks over the drawings, finds none of them conflicts with his design, takes his own roll of plans and leaves the office. The regeneration of Teddy Darman, Hell Digger, is complete.

Disheartened and disgusted, Teddy takes his plans to John Wade, his most bitter enemy. The farmer will have none of them, until his daughter Dora intervenes, begging her father to give Teddy a chance.

The farmers, fortified by Teddy's blue-prints, deliver their ultimatum to Masters, and give him three days for his answer.

On the third day Masters, as yet unaware of Teddy's change of heart, calls Teddy and reveals to him a "frame-up" for the benefit of the farmers. He and Teddy are to be quarreling when the farmers arrive; teddy is to "wallop" him gently; Masters is to fire Teddy, who will then be employed by the farmers to build their dredge - so that it will never work. Teddy seems to agree to the plan.

The farmers arrive; teddy and Masters quarrel, then fight. But it is real on Teddy's part, and the "wallop" he gives Masters is far from gentle. Teddy is now openly affiliated with the farmers.

Masters still has a trump card up his sleeve. He points out to Mr. Rennie, President of the Continental, that the farmers will have to mortgage their lands in order to build the dredge - and that if the company holds their mortgages, the farmers' hands will be tied no

matter what they do. President Rennie calls Crosby Walch, an unscrupulous money-lender and banker, and tells him the situation. Walch goes to the meeting at which the farmers organize their company, and offers to lend them money.

The dredge is built and dedicated, Dora christening it, and Teddy starting it.

In the meantime, Hoskins, the book-keeper, in sympathy with Teddy and the farmers, finds a letter from Walch to Masters, giving a complete list of the farmers whose mortgages his bank holds. Hoskins takes it to Teddy and Wade, and it is decided to run the dredge night and day until enough gold is dredged to pay off the mortgages. A guard is planted at the gang-plank of the "boat" with instructions to let no one aboard without a pass. Searchlights play about the surrounding field all night.

But Masters is not yet through. He hires a crook, who goes that night to plant a bomb where the bucket-line will pick it up. Teddy, who is on guard at the dredge that night, sees Masters prowling about, but as he is on the road, Teddy has no definite quarrel with him, and is forced to let him go.

As is planned, the bucket-line picks up the bomb; it explodes and the dredge is wrecked, most of the machinery going to the bottom of the pond. None of the men are injured, however.

Wade, realizing that violence will not restore the wrecked dredge, decided to sacrifice his farm to save the rest of the valley. So, while Teddy and the farmers are searching for Masters, he tricks Rennie into buying his farm for \$50,000 - enough to rebuild the dredge.

Teddy and the farmers locate Masters on #3 dredge and battle to board the dredge, which, at the beginning of the attack has been converted into a floating fortress.

Masters phones to Rennie and also the sheriff for aid. The sheriff starts for the dredge, followed by Rennie and Wade.

Teddy and the farmers force their way aboard the dredge, lick Masters and his crew just as the sheriff arrives. Masters, his bravado revived by the protection of the law, tells the farmers that Wade has turned traitor and sold them out. Wade's arrival with Bennie confirms the farmers' suspicions and for a moment things look bad for Wade.

Wade tells the farmers he sold out to save the valley. Bennie impressed by the old man's sacrifice, denounces Masters and agrees to use the new rescoiling dredge. Teddy is made general manager of the converted Continental Company and Dora is delighted.

THE END.

Washington, D.C. Aug. 25, 1921,

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AUG 25 1921

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